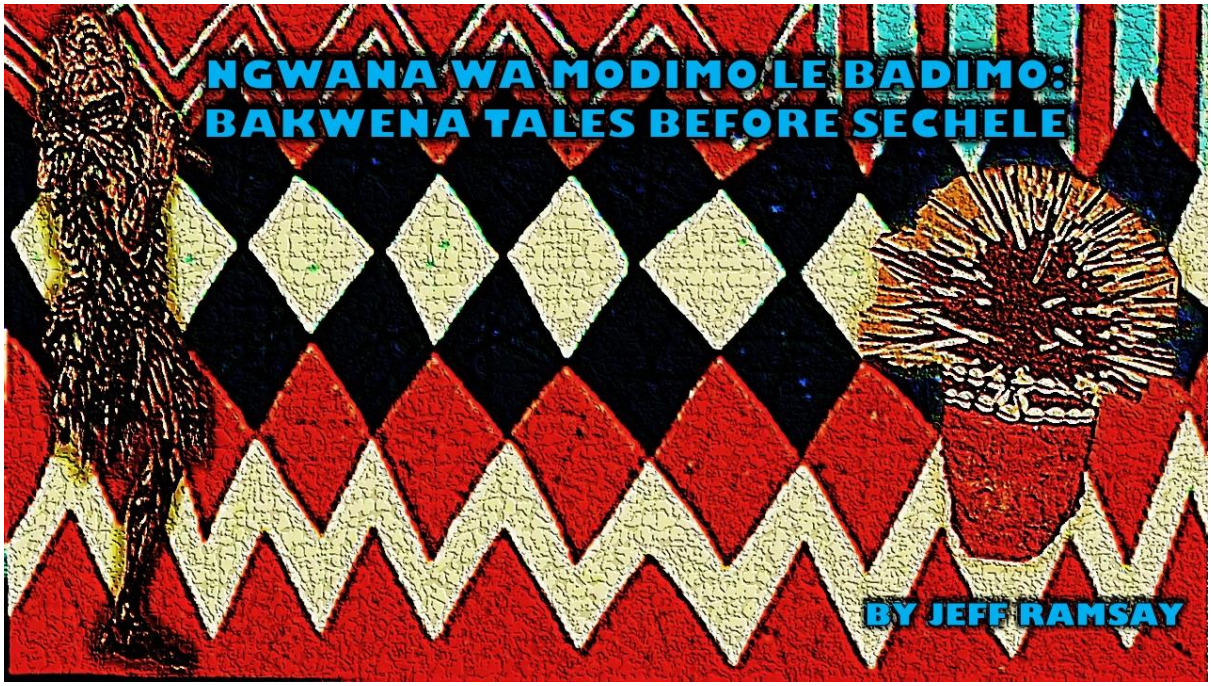

CHILD OF GOD AND THE ANCESTORS: TALES OF THE BAKWENA DYNASTY IN BOTSWANA BEFORE SECHELE BY JEFF RAMSAY

FORWARD

The following document is adapted from articles published in the Monitor newspaper (April-June 2016). They were part of a more extended series focusing on the heritage and early life of the Bakwena ruler Kgosi Sechele I, whose 19th-century reign, in many ways, laid the foundations of today's Botswana.

Sechele's people, the Bakwena of modern Botswana, have existed for over three centuries as a *morafe* or tribal community belonging to the ethno-linguistic group known as Batswana. Their cultural practices, traditional beliefs, and accepted bloodlines are part of the broader category of Sotho-Tswana peoples in Southern Africa.[1] In this context, Sotho-Tswana oral traditions vary in their accounts of historical events. The modest aim of this study is to reconstruct an annotated narrative of Sechele's royal forebears. In this exercise, the author has, to a greater extent, relied on oral traditions recorded before the Second World War. The tales give us an image of the past from an indigenous perspective. As historical evidence, they may be metaphorically understood as an incomplete human illustration rather than a detailed photograph.

[1] In common with other Bantu languages, Sotho-Tswana dialects incorporate classes of noun prefixes. From the Tswana root, we thus have a single Motswana or more than one Batswana who speak Setswana, the latter term often referring to cultural practice and language. The plural of morafe is merafe. The name Bakwena is associated with *"Batho ba bina kwena*," i.e., "The people who dance to the crocodile (totem)."

While one has endeavoured to be faithful to the source material, one does not assume that the resulting text constitutes an uncontested, much less whole, truth chronicling the early dynastic annals of the Bakwena and their neighbours. Instead, it is conceived as an attempt to provide insight into bygone interpretations of the lineage whose legacy moulded Sechele's worldview.

In Setswana, a good person, one who epitomises the humanistic values of *Botho*, may be described as a "Child of God and the Ancestors."[2] This ideal dovetails with such classic axioms as "What is new and worthy is built on what is old."[3] In recognition of these longue durée constructs, the text also discusses indigenous pre-Christian beliefs, whose values continue to shape the spirituality of many Batswana today. These beliefs provide an epistemological and sociocultural basis for Sechele's syncretic Christian perspective, which set him apart as a pioneer in the faith's regional inculturation.

A Profane Act

"Regicide is suicide, citizens. Inscribe that in your hearts. The Great Pretend is a fragile construct." - Bill Willingham.[4]

Our story begins after dawn once upon a time in Botswana. Having walked about two kilometres from their village, armed men arrived at an open spot below a hilly slope. The twin peaks of Shokwane and Shokwane o Monamadi rose behind them. As the morning light glistened off the carbonised iron of their battle axes and spearheads, the Bakwena, now organised into the ranks of their age regiments, sat along the ridge anticipating the day's orders.[5]

The regiments or *mephato* had been renowned as hunters and soldiers for generations, earning their collective praise as "the bold black ones of him who devastates the country."[6] Their martial homage harked back to the unbeaten armies of the long-reigning Kgosi Motswasele I, otherwise remembered as the great "Refuser" - "*Mmamagana*".[7] "Black ones" denoted the dark oval shields that distinguished Bakwena on the battlefield, the finest of which were manufactured with buffalo hide.

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[2] *"Ngwana wa Modimo le Badimo."*
[3] "*Letlhaku le lesha le agelwa mo go le legologolo*"
[4] Bill Willingham, *Fables*, Vol. 18: "Cubs in Toyland".
[5] This reconstruction of Motswasele's execution draws on Rramashoana's June 29, 1916, on-site walk-around account to Rev W.C. Willoughby, in WCW Fille 739, with additional accounts by Mmakgama, Kealeboga Sechele II, Moiteelasilo Sebele, Kalayamore and Kgosidintsi. Also Sebele I in *Dico* [1922] 43-45 and BNA PP 1/1/10 Kwadira Lesele and Phutegelo.
[6] *"Makgakga mantsho agaMmaseotisanaga"*
[7] Schapera, I. [1965], 124-25. Kgosi is the common Setswana title for a Traditional Leader, translated as Chief or King. Plural: Dikgosi, institution Bogosi

As the village warriors gathered, they were mindful that their once indomitable reputation was being challenged in the wake of bloody raids with their neighbouring cousins, the Bangwaketse of Makaba II aMoleta. Some faulted the reckless nature of their monarch, Motswasele II aLegwale, for recent losses that had touched every household of the morafe.

Although the fall harvest beckoned, the living Motswasele had once more summoned them to an armed open-air meeting or *letsholo*. After receiving reports that a gang of cattle thieves had been sighted, he had ordered their urgent mobilisation. The intruder's spoor was still fresh. Who but the "Rod of Moleta" could be bold enough to venture so close to Shokwane?

As Motswasele II approached the *letsholo,* an inescapable sense of foreboding was in the air. Amidst the forest of upright spears spread before him, the Kgosi was cut off from his Mafira regiment, whose proper place by his side had been blocked by his brother Segokotlo's Malalamitwa and uncle Senese's Magata.

Suddenly, a voice shouted out from among the regimental ranks, chastising Motswasele with the revelation that there were no outside thieves to be found, as this was the day for him to pay for his thefts. The Kgosi's point man, Modise, tried to intervene but was shouted down by Moruakgomo aTshosa.

A figure from behind suddenly put his hands on the Motswasele. The king threw off the assailant before fleeing the gathering, accompanied by two younger brothers. A party of would-be assassins broke away in hot pursuit. It is speculated that the conspirators initially allowed Motswasele to escape from the *letsholo*, not wishing to kill him in front of so many eyes. Ultimately, most of the meeting's participants remained complacent, if not complicit, in the unfolding drama.

After running for some distance, Motswasele stopped beside a camel thorn tree near Mmamagana, the abandoned location of the great Motswasele's kraal and presumed resting place.[8] Although the pursuers had been out of sight, they soon appeared, finding their winded prey with his head between his knees. They cut the Kgosi's head with an axe and punctured his body with their spears. His loyal brothers were also slain, as was a female servant later that day when the assassins entered the fallen Kgosi's yard.

As was then customary for rulers who had been either executed or fallen in battle, a few of Motswasele's maternal in-laws covered his body on the spot with stones.

[8] Rramashoana's account suggests that the pursuit lasted for several kilometres. While Motswasele I is also said to have been buried in the vicinity, the once prominent cairn in the area almost certainly marked the grave of his great-grandson and namesake, Motswasele II.

For decades thereafter, a growing pile of rocks and the thorn tree remained to remind people where the one they had praised as "*Modimowagae*", the "God of their home," met his downfall.[9] In the following decades, Motswasele's heir, Sechele, and his brother, Kgosidintsi, allegedly visited their father's grave to plead for rain. Ordinary Bakwena largely avoided the site. Those who did come upon it in their activities rarely lingered, contributing another rock to the mound before moving on.

Stony burial mounds, such as Motswasele II's cairn, were once a common sight in southeastern Botswana, filling the landscape as silent monuments to the region's turbulence. Travelling through the area in 1844, the naturalist poet Henry Methuen prosaically observed:

"Small stone beacons, or kairns, were often noticed by us on our journey. To these, the natives pay much respect, addressing them occasionally with, "Rumala khosee!" or Hail king! In passing, at the same time, contributing a stick or stone to the heap and requesting success in whatever they may be engaged in. When questioned on the subject, they only say that it is a custom handed down to them by their fathers, but they believe chiefs have been buried there."[10]

Motswasele II's tragic fate is recalled in a venerable Setswana phrase: *"Bakwena ba ga se bolaya kgosi"*, which translates as "The Bakwena who can kill their king". Over the decades, these words have been repeated in praise and with resignation as a curse and a threat about the *morafe,* whose forbears committed such an audacious deed.

Having occurred sometime in the Austral fall of 1822 or 1823, the regicide was a traumatic turning point that proved to be both a terminal and seminal moment for the Bakwena.[11] In the wake of their ruler's public execution, the social bonds holding their community together unravelled, leaving them vulnerable to internal power struggles and external invaders. Yet out of this period of chaos, the *morafe* was ultimately reconstructed as the core of a new, more expansive polity under Sechele aMotswasele II's leadership.

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[9] The custom of burial cairns is discussed in Willougby [1932] 27-28, who also refers to Methuen (below).

[10] Methuen [1846] 187. Whether the bodies remained where they had fallen or were removed to be buried in obscurity elsewhere is an open question. Historically, it was common for the bones of Dikgosi and other notables to be secured in secret gravesites.

[11] The year is uncertain. While Schapera has suggested c. 1821, the consistency of Sekwena accounts closely linking the event with the subsequent arrival of Sebetwane's Makololo in the region suggests a later date.

The slaying of Motswasele II was not unprecedented. Around the world, where and whenever there have been monarchs, one may find incidents of their assassination. Such was the case for pre-colonial Sotho-Tswana and other indigenous communities in Southern Africa. Indeed, Sechele's father was neither the first nor the last Bakwena ruler to come to a violent end due to his subjects' machinations.

Nonetheless, the Kgosi's mob execution was a profane act. While dikgosi were considered ordinary men, by birthright, they exercised extraordinary responsibilities. As another ruler of the period humbly observed:

"After all, we are but your servants; men are born and die in the same manner, be they high or low; if there are some who are entitled to obedience, they drive that right from their fellows, who will it thus for the welfare of all."[12]

As the head of the *morafe*, Motswasele II had been its supreme ruler, judge and military commander. He personified its laws and customs and was the ultimate trustee of communal land and wealth. His authority, moreover, transcended temporal matters. Assisted by his traditional doctors (*dingaka),* including rainmakers *(baroka)*, he was entrusted with ensuring the survival and welfare of his subjects by, among other things, shielding them from witchcraft (*boloi*) and blessing them with precipitation. In discharging these earthly burdens, he acted as a medium to the supernatural.

The Anglo-Irish statesman Edmund Burke characterised human society as a partnership "not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born."[13] Translated into Setswana, the Enlightenment figure's musings about states existing as intergenerational compacts would have resonated among the Batswana a half a world away, albeit expressed in terms based on spiritual rather than purely rational political norms.

For Batswana, the affairs of the living were understood to be overseen and shaped by the living souls of dead ancestors, *badimo,* who acted as the mortals' unseen guardians. In fulfilling his responsibilities, the Kgosi was thus entrusted, by virtue of his genealogy, to act as an intermediary between the corporal world of the living and the ethereal realm occupied by members of his deceased lineage. In this context, royal *badimo* were traditionally credited with investing a Kgosi with his divine, albeit popularly mediated, authority.

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[12] Casalis, E. [1861] 206.
[13] From *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, vol. 3, 365.

While only the one Supreme God, known to Batswana as *Modimo,* could make rain, his intangible presence was too far removed from the earthly domain of humans to be directly approached. It was thus necessary for dikgosi to pray to the *badimo* of their bloodline to intercede with *Modimo* on their people's behalf.[14]

At his installation, the slain Kgosi had probably been warned of his responsibilities to his people with timeless admonitions such as "A King is a king by his people" and that the people placed under his care were "not his subjects, but rather those of his father."[15]

The second Motswasele had a long and illustrious pedigree. He was the son of Legwale of Seitlhamo of Motswasele I of Legojane of Motshudi of Kgabo, who had broken away from his senior brother Magopa of Tebele. The last figure was himself, the descendent of an early Bakwena Kgosi named Malope, from whom the royal lineages of the Bangwaketse, Bangwato and Batawana, as well as various additional branches of the Bakwena in South Africa and Lesotho, claim common descent.

The original Malope was descended, via an unknowable number of generations, from Motone, who appears as the earliest remembered Kgosi of the people who dance to the crocodile totem in the existing genealogical record.

While there is a tendency in any oral culture for traditions to compress events and personalities over time, folk memory does preserve an enduring appreciation of common roots. It is generally believed that the ruling families of the above *merafe* and those of the Bakgatla and Barolong, including such offshoots as the Bakaa, claim deeper descent from an ancient ruler named Masilo.

Go Tswa Goo Lowe

A common Setswana phrase for "time immemorial" is "*go tswa goo Lowe*," which more literally translates as "since Lowe". Beyond common kinship, the putative descendants of Masilo, along with neighbouring Bakgalagari groups such as the Bakgwatheng (Bakgwatlheng), share a genesis myth about an ancestor of Masilo named Matsieng, known to some as the earliest Tautona, who is said to have come into this world through an opening in the ground near the modern village of Rasesa. The spot is alternately identified as Matsieng's or Lowe's hole.

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[14] Variations of the word, as well as the concept of *badimo*, can be found among speakers of Bantu languages throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, e.g., Mbiti [1990] 74-89; Bae [2007] 47-61 Batibo [2017] 24-25.

[15] *"Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho"* and *"Ga se batho ba gago, ke ba ga rrago"*

Throughout Southern Africa, Sotho-Tswana traditions generally agree that the first ancestors emerged from the ground.[16] While several reputed "caves of life" exist throughout the region, including a cavity near Kopong that has also been associated with Lowe, the rock formation by Rasesa with its large cistern has long been preeminent in local origin myths.

According to legend, Matsieng acted under the influence of Lowe, who, similar to ancient mythical beings like the Gaelic *Fachan* and Arabian *Nasnas*, is characterised as a giant with just one eye, arm and leg. The mortal Matsieng had once lived in carefree bliss in the underground realm of Tintibane before being tempted by Lowe to follow the light to the surface world between the Earth and the Sky. A foot-shaped depression where the giant once stood and petroglyphs associated with Matsieng's footprints feature at the site.[17]

Banished by Tintibane from returning to his previous subterranean comfort, Matsieng initially suffered from hunger. Tintibane then took pity on him, giving him wild animals to hunt and goats to domesticate, including the giraffe who guided the founding father to a place of women.[18]

Was Tinitbane conceived as a manifestation of God, *Modimo*, or a demigod? Perhaps he began as the soul of an ancient royal ancestor whose spirit now permeated the Earth. While the nature of his inception may be clouded, he was indeed a figure of significance among pre-Christian Bakwena.

In Motswasele II's time, Tintibane was revered as a protector and the guardian of the lower world, "the hole that cannot be filled", to whom the dead were returned through the rite of burial.[19] He was addressed as "The child of the Supreme God and Earth," with whom the following common oath-bound Bakwena:

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[16] While not universal origin myths of a subterranean ascent are common across much of Africa, e.g., Willoughby [1932] 66-70, Mbiti [1990] 91. Among Bakwena and other Sotho-Tswana peoples, they are often paired with tales of migration from "Ntswana-Tsatsi", i.e., "where the sun rises".

[17] Contemporary accounts often confuse Matsieng with Lowe, while Tintibane is substituted for Lowe in other Sotho-Tswana accounts. Setiloane [1975] 35 identifies Lowe with Batswana accounts and Tintibane and Thobega with Basotho, but all three names appear as distinct figures in the early Bakwena traditions.

[18] By the early twentieth century, oral accounts had begun to incorporate explanations for the prevailing hierarchical division between white people (*Lekgowa/Makgowa*) and blacks. For example, Wilman [1918] notes an account stating that at Lowe, the first whites remained behind to receive God's wisdom while Matsieng impatiently went off to hunt wildebeest.

[19] *"Mosima oo sa tlaleng"* see Setiloane [1975] 34.

"I swear by Tintibane, son of the soil, sealed by the soil I repel, humbly approaching the little calabash that is a Moseki's place."[20]

Matsieng's patrilineal descendants, generally people that would in recent times be aggregated under the labels Bakgalagari (Bakgalalgadi) and western Batswana, prayed for Tintibane's intervention through the mediums of Lowe and Thobega-a-Phatswa. The latter, identified in his youthful manifestation as Thibela, became immortal after marrying Tintibane's daughter, Mmape. He then assumed the status of the underworld's gatekeeper, whose mediums were associated with particular caves.[21]

In their tales of Matsieng, Lowe and Tintibane, generations of Batswana and Bakgalagari thus affirmed their status as indigenous occupiers of the ground where their earliest ancestors had first trod. When European missionaries and early travellers first arrived in the region, they discovered the rock engravings associated with Lowe and Matsieng near Rasesa as a place of region-wide pilgrimage.[22]

Beyond its significance in genesis mythology, sources claim that the Bakwena lived in the area around Lowe generations before the 17th-century migration of Kgosi Kgabo's followers into what is today Botswana. In 1926, when two Molepolole elders, Kgabo aTebele and Motswakhumo aKgosidintsi, were tasked with communicating the tribal traditions of the Bakwena to the British Resident Magistrate, they maintained that the earliest Kgosi known to them in any detail was Masilo I, who "lived at Lowe, close to what is now Mochudi" before relocating to Rathateng and later Mogalakwena (near Odi) where Kwena was born.[23]

The pair further asserted that Bakwena settlement along the Marico or Madikwe River preceded the morafe's move to the subsequent Mogopa heartland of central Transvaal. Their chronology of migration is supported by Bakwena bagaMogopa traditions of the period, e.g., G.P. Sepeng, who in 1939 observed:

"The chiefs that were before Malope are not accurately known. Those who relate Bakwena history always begin with Malope, who is regarded as the father of all Bakwena.

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[20] *"Ngwana wa Modimo le Mafatshe… Ke a ikana ka Tintibane, a ngwana wa Mafatshe, ka thibe ka lefatshe ka lelemela sefonyana se se kwa go Moseki."* Note in WCW file 739 and Willoughby [1932] 75.

[21] Willoughby [1932] 69-77.

[22] Campbell, J. [1815] 306–07, Chapman, J. [1971] I, 244; Moffat, R. [1842]263; Methuen [1846] 186; Livingstone in Schapera [1959] I 253; also cited in Anderson [1856] 221; Willougby [1932] 69–77.

[23] BNA D.C. Mol. 4/14 [1926] "History of Bakwena".

"The Bakwena lived at Lowe. Lowe lies below the Marico and Notswana [Notwane] *rivers towards the west. Later, they removed their abode and went down the Marico River to Rathateng. When they went to Rathateng, Chief Malope was already dead. They went there with Mmangwato and Ngwaketse, the sons of Malope."*[24]

The primaeval folklore surrounding legendary figures such as Matsieng, Masilo and Malope runs counter to the still commonly heard claim that the Bantu, the term used during the Apartheid era in South Africa to encompass virtually all indigenous Africans, are recent invaders into the region.

Inspiration for this colonial era turned Bantu Education distortion, which persists in crude versions of classroom teaching about "Bantu Migration," can be traced to George William Stow's influential 1905 tome, *The Native Races of South Africa*, as posthumously edited by George McCall Theal. Stow's thesis is explicitly set out in the book's preface, which asserts that "the Bushmen alone were the true aborigines of the country and that all stronger races without exception were mere intruders."[25]

In the context of the post-Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) consolidation of white supremacy, culminating in the 1910 Union of South Africa and 1913 Land Act, Stow's premise served as a convenient justification for dismissing land claims made on behalf of the various Khoe groups then aggregated as "Hottentots" as well as Bantu language speakers. Stow otherwise characterised the latter group as "men whose savage and untutored instincts urged them to plunder the more peaceful and well-disposed colonists and to glory in the excitement of continuous raids upon the herds of their white neighbours."

Like many of his peers, Stow further targeted missionaries for supposedly stirring up ill-will through land and indigenous rights claims against white settlers, observing that:

"The simple fact that certain tribes were found occupying some given tract of country at the time of the missionary's arrival was of itself, without further question, deemed irrefragable proof that these particular natives must have been its rightful owners from time immemorial. Thus, erroneous statements and unfounded claims were not only promulgated but upheld with a holy fervour, a positiveness of assertion, and acrimony of feeling, which were only equalled by the profound ignorance of the disputants with regard to the real state of the case.

[24] Warmelo K 32/25 Sepeng [1939]
[25] Stow [1905] viii – xii.

"The white nations were looked upon and spoken of as the only intruders into the ancient domains of the "poor natives" and the only race which had trodden underfoot with a remorselessness and cruelty deserving universal execration, the rights of the ill-treated aborigines."[26]

Stow's dubious notion that the Cape Khoe, along with the Sotho-Tswana and other divergent Southern Bantu language communities, are recent arrivals to Southern Africa has long been countered by the accumulation of archaeological evidence suggesting incremental changes in local settlement patterns over the last two millennia.

Additional evidence of local roots manifests in the organic divarication of the region's multifarious languages over time. In this respect, the oral cultures embedded in local languages and dialects give voice to a rich diversity of identities forged over many centuries. Beyond their origin myths and ancient dynastic legends, the autochthonous consciousness of Sotho-Tswana communities is further reflected in their pre-Christian cosmology.

The Old God: *Modimo wa Kgale*

"Bantu life is basically religious. Religion so pervades the life of the people that it regulates their doing and governs their leisure to an extent that it is hard for Europeans to imagine." - W.C. Willoughby.[27]

Before the coming of Christianity, Batswana, along with other Sotho-Tswana-speaking communities, believed in a supreme God, *Modimo*, whom they knew as the "God of gods, the invisible God, the God of the heavens."[28] European appreciation of this distinctive faith dates at least as far back as the 1805 visit to the Batlhaping by Dr Hinrich Lichtenstein, a pioneer German physician, explorer, botanist and zoologist who observed:

"They venerate an invisible Being, whom they call Murimo, as the cause of all appearances in nature, and the origin of all the good and evil that happens to them, without any act of their own."[29]

This broad concept of a supreme deity is common among Bantu language communities throughout much of Sub-Saharan Africa.

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[26] Stow [1905] viii-ix.
[27] Willoughby [1928] 1.
[28] *"Modimo wa medimo, Modimo wa go tinelela, Modimo wa magodimo"*.
[29] Lichtenstein [1815] 332. At the time, he was employed by the enlightened Batavia Republic governor at the Cape Jan Willem Janssens.

Its identity is expressed by variations of such names as "*Nyambe*," "*Malungu*," and "*Mwari*," as well as the common Sotho-Tswana appellation "*Modimo/Molimo*".

Without definite gender, the old God, *Modimo wa kgale*, could be alternately identified as a mother and father figure. *Modimo* was further understood as the infinite creator or "*Motlhodi*" and thus described as the "one without ancestry, having no beginning or end."[30]

Although *Modimo* has been commonly associated with being physically located above (*fa godimo*) when the early missionaries co-opted the name, it was also said to have been associated with the now archaic verb *"go Dima"*, translated as to pass or penetrate through something. An early Motswana evangelist, Maphakela aLekalake, demonstrated this concept to a missionary colleague, the Rev. John Brown, by dropping oil on a blotting paper. Turning the paper over, he showed how the oil had passed through, further noting that *Modimo* was a spiritual force that permeated all things in the past as in the present.[31]

In many Bantu languages, besides those of the Sotho-Tswana, the root noun "*dimo"*, alternatively expressed as *"dimu/zimu/rimo",* also denotes ancestral spirits. This fact suggests that the Sotho-Tswana *Modimo/Molimo* etymology can be linguistically traced to the broader language family's proto-form for primogenitor.[32]

Modimo was also known by other names that further described the supreme Deity's many qualities, such as *Montshi* (Giver), *Modiri* (Maker), and *Mothei* (Founder). These titles set *Modimo* apart from the medimo or lesser deities, such as *Tintibane* and the *badimo*. As such, the Godhead was the ultimate source of royal authority, as expressed in such proverbs as "*Modimo* is ever on the side of the Kgosi."[33]

As with the ancient Semitic numerology in the Bible, the pre-Christian *Modimo* was also linked with the number seven. The traditional taboo against pointing one's seventh finger at someone is said to have been a testament to this fact.

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[30] *"O sena lotso, ga ona pele le marago"*
[31] Smith, E. [1914] 154 also Smith, E. [1950] 117. Setiloane [1975] 64.
[32] Batibo [2017] 24-32.
[33] *Ntlha ya Kgosi e iwe ke Modimo*

Further corroboration of *Modimo's* omnipotence can be found in surviving pre-Christian prayers and hymns. With the beginning of missionary influence, many came to share a somewhat subversive opening verse: "New gods, pray for us to the God of old."[34] The following example was said during hard times:

"God of my forefathers, I lie down hungry, though others have eaten, and lie down full. Even if it is but a polecat or a little rock rabbit, I shall rejoice; I cry to God, Father of my ancestors."[35]

Even with such evidence, historians and theologians have continued to debate the pre-Christian concept of *Modimo*.[36] Echoing the sentiments of early missionaries, some question the existence of *Modimo* as a unifying deity before 19th-century missionaries translated it as the God of Abraham and Moses in Moffat's Bible.

However, the ancient Deity is firmly embedded in cultural practice and the oral traditions of Sotho-Tswana communities. *Modimo* indeed appears to permeate all things, albeit sometimes silently, as there were situational taboos about voicing the Lord's name. Many Setswana personal names, for example, pay subtle homage to *Modimo*. For example, a baby welcomed into the world as *Keneilwe-ke-Modimo* ("God has given me") will be known as Keneilwe.[37]

Having initially, like his Father-in-Law and mentor, the Rev. Robert Moffat, been dismissive of the existence of indigenous beliefs, the first missionary to live among the Bakwena, the Rev. Dr David Livingstone, ultimately came to a universalist view that *Modimo* of the Bible was indeed the same as the *Modimo* known to the heathens. He thus concluded that:

"There is no necessity for beginning to tell even the most degraded of all these people of the existence of a God or of the future state, the facts being universally admitted. Everything that common causes cannot account for is ascribed to the Deity, such as creation, sudden death, etc...

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[34] Ellenberger, D.F. [1912] 239. "*Medimo e mesha e rapelela Modimo wa kgale*"

[35] Brown, J.T. [1926] 114. "*Modimo wa borara, Ke letse ke sa ja, Ke letse le tlhala, Ba bangwe be jele, Ba letse ba kgotse, Leha e ele montsho, Le sekomenyana, Nka itumela, Ke bitsa Modimo, Borraro namagola."*

[36] Among recent scholars, Landau, P.S. [2010] 75-76 maintains: "It makes little sense to think in terms of a traditional religious system, per se, or even a set of practices and ideas with discrete religious function over most of Southern Africa. There is no separate body of practices with an interpretive priesthood or set of rituals: no accepted ideas connected to the afterlife or eternal life, no vision of an omnipotent God standing apart from men and time. No religious system or spiritual domain can be postulated before the missionaries introduced those ideas themselves."

[37] Discussed in Setiloane [1975], 235-37

"On questioning intelligent men among the Bakwains as to their former knowledge of good and evil, of God, and the future state, they have scouted the idea of any of them ever having been without a tolerably clear conception on all these subjects. Respecting their sense of right and wrong, they profess that nothing we indicate as sin ever appeared to them otherwise, except the statement that it was wrong to take more wives than one, and they declare that they spoke in the same way of the direct influence exercised by God in giving rain in answer to prayers of the rainmakers, and in granting deliverance in times of danger, as they do now before they ever heard of white men."[38]

Ironically, in Livingstone's view, the general absence of idol worship among non-Christian Batswana blinded many of his contemporaries to the strength of their flock's intangible pre-existing faith. This revelation contributed to the Scotsman's ultimate faith in the primacy of African agency in evangelising Africa.

Livingstone's, at the time among Europeans, unorthodox opinions about African capacity for self-actualisation in matters of faith were in his lifetime arguably substantiated in the proselytising success of his non-conformist disciple and sole known convert, Sechele, who, in the words of the prominent Southern African historian Neil Parsons, ultimately "did more to propagate Christianity in nineteenth-century southern Africa than virtually any single European missionary."[39]

The Ancestors

"When approaching the chapel (a very decent affair, I assure you), Sechele said, with a tone indicating great complacency, 'Come and I will show you something', and entering the chapel, pointed to me his own name, Moroa Mososele Maroa etc., occupying a line of the wall of five or six yards, right opposite the pulpit, his own name in double the size of the others, white on dark background. I remarked that I had the day before looked with grief on that which appeared to give him pleasure. He looked wonders at me. I asked him what his name, with a string of his heathen forefathers, did in such a position and if it comported with either the house or the solemn purpose for which it was erected?" - Robert Moffat, 1857[40]

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[38] Livingstone [1857], 158-59. The missionary found polygamy to be the most significant stumbling block to Sechele's conversion. Among 19th-century European visitors to the region, Livingstone and Lichtenstein were not entirely alone in their insights. For example, Methuen [1846] 187, citing indigenous origin stories, asserted: "This proves the natives of South Africa not to be universally ignorant of a Supreme Being, or the immortality of the soul."

[39] Tomkins, S. BBC (March 19, 2013)

[40] From an August 22, 1857 letter to his wife in Moffat, R. [1945] 33.

"A more controversial aspect of the Congolese celebration comes at the beginning of the Mass, with the invocation of the saints and ancestors. 'And you,' worshippers say, 'our righteous ancestors be with us.'"– Ricardo da Silva, 2020[41]

By the beginning of the last century, several indigenous accounts of the Bakwena Royal lineage had been recorded.[42] Notwithstanding tales about legendary figures like Matsieng and his sons Masilo and Masiloyana, these accounts generally agree that the earliest Bakwena Kgosi whose lineage could be traced was Kwena, who was followed by Monageng, Kwena II, Masilo II, Mogale, Mfheta, Kolobe, and Raadira.

After that, Bakwena royals were split between the descendants of Raadira's sons Magope (Mogopa) and his brother Mmamagana (not to be confused with Motswasele I, who, as we have seen, shared his praise name). The Bakwena at Molepolole are descendants of the earlier Mmamagana's lineage. Mmamagana was followed by Motone, Phokotsea, and Masilwe, the father of Kwena III. The latter figure begat Phokotsea II, the father of Malope II, who is also said to have been the father of Mohurutshe, Ngwatwe, Ngwaketse and Khutwe.

While more modern versions have often affirmed that Mohurutshe, Kwena, Ngwato and Ngwaketse were the literal children of Malope, comparative analysis of the surviving genealogies for each of these merafe, along with other material evidence, calls into question the belief that the principal royal lines of the Bahurutshe and Bakwena, including Bangwato and Bangwaketse, all converged in a single generation of siblings.

Ngwato likely predated Ngwaketse by at least two generations, while the division between the progenitors of Bahurutshe and Bakwena royal lineages almost certainly goes back much further.

From Malope II, the line passed to Kgabo I and then to Tebele, the father of Mogope II and a junior brother named Kgabo. It was the latter who founded the Bakwena Baga Kgabo dynasty in Botswana.

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[41] Da Silva, R. [2020] "Explainer: What is the Zaire rite—and why is Pope Francis talking about it now?" *America, The Jesuit Review of Faith and Culture*, December 7, 2020.

[42] The early Genealogies of Kgabo aTebele and others in WCW file 739, Sebele I in Wookey [1913] and Mmopi in *Mahoko a Becoana* [1890] are generally consistent with genealogies found in Stow [1905]. Stow is said to have relied on information from the Molepolole-based missionary Roger Price. Also, Bruetz [1987], Okihiro [BNR & Thesis, 1976], and the Schapera and Van Niekerk papers in BNA.

There is a story that the names Kgabo ("Flame") and Tebele ("Stranger/Plunderer") are originally associated with an incident when Malope's village was raided and set on fire by "Mashona", who were possibly Bahumbe-Bakalanga of Madabhale Chibundule or one of his successors.[43]

A house with bushes at its entrance, marking it as the secluded abode of Malope's senior wife and her newborn son, was spared from the flames that consumed the rest of the village. The merciful marauders further left behind milk goats for the sustenance of the child of the Kgosi, whose herds they had just looted.

Kgabo the Hunter

By the time of Mogope II and Kgabo II, the Bakwena were living together in the Mabyanamatshwana Hills of today's South Africa. Recent archaeology and oral traditions have linked the same region to a longstanding settlement of Batswana communities debatably associated in the literature with such labels as "Bakone" and "Baphofu Confederacy," as well as the "Kgatla-Kwena Mabyanamatshwana Complex."[44]

During the second half of the 17th century, severe drought resulting in the spectre of famine gripped the hillside homeland of the Bakwena under paramount Kgosi Mogope II, causing various sections of the community to spread out in search of food. Some branches of the Bakwena migrated southward as far as Lesotho. For his part, the second known Magope moved his headquarters north-westward, settling at Rathateng. Located near the junction of the Madikwe and Limpopo or Kwena rivers, along the modern Botswana-South Africa border, in times of drought, the environment was advantaged by its perennial waters and proximity to rich hunting grounds.

As was noted, Rathateng may have previously served as a place of residence for the Bakwena. During Magopa II's stay, his brother Kgabo enjoyed success leading regiments westward into modern Botswana, where they replenished themselves by hunting and, in all probability, raiding for livestock. After several years, with the drought having lifted, the second Mogope decided to return to the more fertile farmland at Mabyanamatshwana. Kgabo, who was then leading another hunting expedition, said he would follow his senior brother and Kgosi later, but he never did.

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[43] Brown, J.T. [1926] 230. History of Chibundule Mambo in Ramsay, J. [2016]: By the 16th century, the Chibundule kings cast a large shadow across much of northern South Africa, northeastern Botswana, and western Zimbabwe.

[44] Stow [1905], 518-543, Campbell, J [1822], 202; also Rramashoana WCW 715; Pistorius [Dec. 1995] 49-64; Pistorius & Steyn [Sept. 1995] 68-77; Ngcongco, L. [2008] 21-46; also Moton, F. [2003, 2013, 2024]. Standard textbook version of Baphofu Confederacy in Tlou & Campbell [1997] 96-97, 104-07.

Notwithstanding what proved to be a decisive break as late as the 19th century, it was typical for Bakwena in Botswana to refer to themselves as "BagaMogopa", whose rulers' ritual seniority is still recognised among Bakwena royals.[45]

From Rathateng, Kgabo cast a covetous eye towards the Ditejwane Hills, then the home territory of the Bakgwatheng of Kgosi Magane, who had broken away earlier from the Barolong.

The relatively well-watered and easily fortified hills of the Bakgwatheng would provide a comfortable haven from which Kgabo could access the rich hunting grounds of the Kalahari (Setswana: Kgalagadi) interior.[46] They were also strategically located at the nexus of the significant trans-Kalahari trade routes running north-east to the great Banayayi Kingdom of the Nichasike Mambos (who, during the same approximate period, had displaced the Chibundule line), north and north-west to the arcadia of the Okavango-Chobe-Zambezi region and west and southwest to the Namaqua or Nama-Khoe merchants in modern Namibia. At the time, much of the lucrative trade along these routes was controlled by the Barolong alongside the Bakgwatheng.

As a further enticement, the area on the eastern side of Molepolole Hill was also a significant centre of iron mining and production, which was then controlled by a branch of the Bakgwatheng known as the Banakedi, after its founder, Kgosi Nakedi a Pitshane.

Given suggestions of past residence and Lowe's ancient prominence, as well as their recent forays, the lands of southeastern Botswana were undoubtedly familiar to Bakwena of Kgabo aTebele, whose followers included the Bangwaketse and Bangwato.

Early Bangwaketse traditions suggest that the original Ngwaketse aMalope II may have previously settled at Magarapa Hill, adjacent to Molepolole and Dithejwane. This possibility could place a Bangwaketse presence in the region three generations before Ngwaketse's great-grandson Khutwane joined forces with Kgabo in subjugating the Bakgwatheng.

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[45] BNA D.C. Molepolole 4/14 "History of Bakwena," including the 1926 testimony of Kgabo Tebele and Motswakhumo Kgosidintsi. This author became aware of the continuing connection in 1986 when a local Kgosi explained why he had gone to present his bride to the BagaMogopa Kgosi in South Africa. In recent years, various Bakwena dikgosi from the region have interacted at the annual Dithubaruba festival in Molepolole.

[46] The name Kalahari is derived from Sotho-Tswana Kgalagari or Kgalagadi, from the root *gala*, which denotes thirst. Thus, Kalahari is an arid "thirsty land."

Besides Khutwane's Bangwaketse and the accompanying Bangwato, under Madirana aSerogolo, Kgabo found an additional ally in the Bakaa of Kgosi Magogwe aTseme, who were then settled at Mmopane.[47] It is said that this was after Magogwe's grandfather, Maleke aNoto, refused to recognise the paramount authority of his brother Morara, leading to a dynastic split among the Barolong. Under Tseme, the Bakaa then migrated northwards into modern Botswana.[48]

Having rallied the mephato of his potent coalition, Kgabo forcibly seized the Dithejwane hills from Magane's Bakgwatheng, whose unity was permanently shattered after the conquest. Some Bakgwatheng became subjects of the Bakwena, while others fled westward into the Kalahari sand veld or northward to the Shoshong Hills.[49]

Still others, led by a son of Magane named Tau, found refuge with the Bangwaketse. A dynastic alliance was forged, with Tau's sister becoming the great wife of Khutwane's heir, Makaba I.

Kgabo's violent scattering of the Bakgwatheng established what would become a long-term pattern of Batswana subjugation of Bakgalagari communities in modern Botswana. However, it is doubtful that there initially existed much consciousness or context for a clear binary division between these two Sotho-Tswana groupings. Over time, the meanings attached to "Batswana" and "Bakgalagari" have been defined by evolving patterns of socio-economic marginalisation. As communities like the Bakgatheng were dispossessed of their better lands and livestock and pushed into the arid sand veld, they became collectively associated with their new environment and circumstance as "people of the Kgalagadi".[50] This process was still ongoing in the 19th century, leaving a legacy of victimisation that persists. The pattern was well entrenched by the time of Motswasele II's regent Tshosa (c. 1803-07), whose praise poem contains the suggestive verse:

"I oppose the killing of Bakgalagadi, paupers with nothing of their own; a rich man eats those rich like himself, a handsome one eats those handsome as he." [51]

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[47] BNA PP 1/2/6 Bakaa, including the 1892 manuscript "Mahoko A Bakaa." Bakaa claim the name Mmopane is derived from the son of Magogwe, who was born at the hill. Also Ngcongco [1979] 31.
[48] According to oral traditions, the name "Bakaa" is derived from Morara's dismissal of the significance of their night-time departure with the words *"ba ka ya bao,"* implying that they could go.
[49] Shekgalagari tradition in Schapera & Van derMerwe [1945]. Also Tlou & Campbell [1997] "Origins of Batswana and Bakgalagadi".
[50] Okihiro examined the process in his 1976 thesis and Ramsay [1991]. A broader study of marginalisation within the Kalahari political economy in Wilmsen [1989].
[51] Schapera, I [1965] 126: *"Ke gana gobolawa Bakgalagadi, basetlhana basenang ditsabone; ngwana wadikgomo oja badikgomo kaene, motshwena aje batshwana kaene."*

Motshodi the Good

Across the boundaries of continents and cultures, one finds in the early myths and annals of royalty figures who conform to shared notions of the “Good King”. Jungian psychologists have interpreted the ideal qualities of a Good King as the ultimate archetype of the "mature masculine". In this context, the archetypical Good King is understood as a man of accomplishment who is fair, honourable, virtuous, wise and understanding. He is a monarch who cares about his subjects regardless of social rank, ultimately placing the collective well-being of his realm above personal desire.

Kgabo’s heir, Kgosi Motshodi, is portrayed as having possessed such timeless virtues. His long reign is characterised as a golden age of social harmony that stood in contrast to the tumults subsequently endured under his descendants. He was extolled in praise poems, songs, and oral traditions as having balanced strength with compassion. He was the kind-hearted crocodile who was ever willing to provide for those in need, being the benefactor of the poor and orphans. His granaries were always full. His hunts were as bountiful as his harvests.[52]

Motshodi aKgabo was a keen judge of people, “*Mmaseatlholo-batho,*” who favoured those in the community who had little when distributing captured cattle. He was praised as the ruler with a motherly heart, “*pelo namagadi*,” who said: "Select them, be gentle with them, eat some but put others aside, for those that remain will be shared among the helpers."[53]

Throughout his reign, Motshodi kept his headquarters close to the banks of the Notwane River, first at Oodi, then Moshweu (in modern Gaborone), and finally at Phutadikobo Hill. The latter became his final resting place, which is why the contemporary settlement at the site bears his name; its common spelling, "Mochudi," is a product of earlier orthography.

Even during the infirmity of his last years, when he was confined mainly to his homestead, it is claimed that Motshodi still effectively watched over his community and all those who visited it. Pickets were posted at his borders to inform him of any arrivals. Notable visitors would be greeted at the village gates with food and presents. Beneficiaries of his hospitality included other rulers and vassals who came to greet the great son of Kgabo.

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[52] Motshudi's good qualities are detailed in Kgabo Tebele's manuscript in WCW file 739.
[53] From Kgabo aTebele, original orthography: “*Mokgethi moneneketse Kwana, Oa ga Maseatlhoeabatho! A ko u di kgotla: Le tse di setseng, Di tla nowa Makoko.”*

Celebrated as an able warrior, Motshodi built upon his father's legacy by expanding the Bakwena realm further into the Kalahari. However, as his rule progressed, he was more renowned as a benevolent peacekeeper than a conqueror. According to the undoubtedly romanticised Sekwena narrative, he exercised his sway over the remnants of the Bakgwatlheng and Baboloangwe whom his father had once crushed as a benevolent despot. He thus would accept a single ox as a token of tribute from impoverished communities of the Kalahari interior.

Motshodi's reputed desire to spread his authority over the Kweneng-Kgalagadi may have contributed to the migration of the Bagangwaketse section of the Bakwena under Khutwane's grandson Mongala aMakaba I. Moving southwest, they began to compete with the Barolong and Batlharo for control of the Kalahari communities and trade in what is now southern Botswana. In the process, Mongala peacefully reasserted his dynasty's autonomy while continuing to recognise the son of Kgabo's seniority.

In verse, Motshodi's reputation as a unifier of *merafe* was eulogised as having the strength of two thorn trees whose intertwined branches bound communities together:

"Whose gate is this? It is of Motshodi of Mokwena, who is very thin and an agile warrior of good qualities. Ask herd boys; they will tell you this is the gate of Motshodi of Mokwena, the robust and thin man whose subjects steadily multiply. He is like the morutlhatshana and mokgalo thorn trees. We are bound to one another by the hook, their thorns, their ugly hands holding us tightly together. Only the strength of his muscles can divide the bonds that hold us together.

"Where else did the blue crane [mogolodi] that brings good rains and the secretary bird [tlhame)] who is a provider ever live together in such harmony? When we began to love one another as his subjects, the secretary bird caught a locust and gave it to the crane."

"You come to us through the big gate; you ask the herd boys whose gate is this? They will tell you that it is one of the robust and thin man, the path that leads to pregnancies, the morutlhatshana and mokgalo trees that hold each other by hook thorns, and the strong muscle can pull them apart.

"This is Motshodi's praise, Motshodi, who dishes inside the house. How do you see those outside the house? Motshodi, when you let go, the shield might be pierced. Who will then mend it? Mateane'a is finished, already torn."[54]

[54] *"Kgoro e ke eo mang e? Eo Mochudi a Mokwena; Eo o mosesane o hata; O gatela baimanyana. Lo re tsona ka kgoro kgolo, Lo botse badisa. Ba tla lo bolelela, ba re, Kgoro e, Eo Mochudi a Mokwena. Eo mosesane thata; O gatela baima bangwe. Ke ene eo go tweng Morutlhatsana le mokgalo.*

Mateane was the mophato of Motshodi's ill-fated heir, Legojane. As with many legendary monarchs, Motshudi the Good's long and supposedly harmonious reign ended with dynastic tragedy. It is said that he wished to designate his son Maoto as his heir but was frustrated by the opposition of his *dikgosana*. Thus, when the Mateane regiment was initiated through the rigours of *bogwera* school, Motshodi insisted that Maoto be given precedence before Legojane, the senior son of his recognised senior wife, Mamatona.

However, the *dikgosana* nonetheless circumcised Legojane first. When the Kgosi asked, "What has happened?" the *dikgosana* replied, "What is wrong?" The spurned Maoto descendants would ultimately find refuge with the Bangwaketse.[55]

For his part, Legojane did not live long enough to assume the throne. His life ended when he led the Mateane on a raid into the country of the Batalaote or Badalaunde, whose outposts then extended as far south as modern Mahalapye. The Batalaote were united under a ruler named Legane, a vassal of the Banyayi Mambo ("King of Kings") Nichasike (Changamire) with whom he claimed common descent. The failure of Legojane's expedition is reflected in the following praise poem:

"Thirst and heat, Bakalanga, you could kill us. I have not captured anything. I only captured a small goat with a scab. Tell this tale of great sadness. Tell us about the Bukalanga incidents. Tell us about the incidents at [the Bakwena baga] Kgabo's. We went there with care and stealth. We hid away from Legwape. But then, we found ourselves face-to-face with Legane. With Legane, there is no rain, only mist clouds in the air. Then a small cloud hangs around."[56]

Motswasele the Refuser

As a result of Legojane's demise, Motshodi was succeeded by Motswasele I, the son of the fallen Mokwena and his senior wife, Malebo. Motswasele's effective rule began with him acting as his grandfather's regent during the Good King's final years.

Chwaraganafi ka diobe, Mabogo mabe machwarani, Matla a nama a lesanya. Mogolotsana le tlhame, Lo ratanye ka kae? E rile fha re tla ratana, Tlhame a kapa tisane, Ae Neela mogolori! Ba re ke bonye pitse mo tlhabenfi. Ka re, 'Mabalabale'; Fhalafhala le pitse. Mabala dia chwana."

[55] Maoto's direct descendants are found today in the Bangwaketse capital, Kanye.

[56] *"Lenyora, we! Letsatsi, we! Makalaka lo kaka loa re boela; Lo kaka loa re khutlela Maririma. Kea gapa sepe; Ke gapile podi. Ke gapile podinyana ea sekgwakgwa, Podi tlaa! U bolele diokoko. U ko u bue dilo tsa Bokalaka. U tlo u bue dilo tsa kwa ga Kgabo. Re tsamaile ra itiketsa thata; Legwape le ena ra mo itiketsa; Ra ba ra lebana le Leganana [Legane]; Leganana ea re go sena pula, Go tlo go fhela go thiba mouwane, Go fhela go thibathiba lerunyana."*

In contrast to Motshodi, the first Motswasele is remembered as a cunning, if not ruthless, figure who could inspire fear in friend and foe alike. He was praised as "*Mmamagana*" for his stubborn grit, strategic intelligence and courage in battle.

Motswasele's baptism in fire came early in his reign, if not regency when he assisted the Bangwaketse in crushing the Bakgwatheng once more.[57] This alliance came about a generation after many of the Bakgwatheng led by Kgosi Tau had found refuge among the Bangwaketse. At this point, Gangwaketse can be considered a distinct polity, though contemporary references by neighbours often still refer to the lands of BagaNgwaketse and BagaKgabo collectively as "Bokwena."

At the end of Mongala's reign, Tau's son Mabeleng and grandson Seeiso sought to reassert Bakgwatheng independence. Following an altercation between Seeiso and Mongala's son Moleta, Mabeleng led his people to a place known as Kgaloong-loo-Tau, near Segeng.

In pursuit, Mongala attacked Mabeleng's position. In his eagerness for action, if not misplaced pride, Mongala failed to bring a sufficient force. As a result, the Bangwaketse suffered a severe defeat, with Mongala being captured and speared to death.

In seeking revenge, Mongala's son Moleta cooperated with Motswasele. The bitter nature of the ensuing conflict is suggested by the fact that, while Mabeleng is remembered as a Shekalagari folk hero, he became a virtual non-person in Setswana accounts. Moleta and Motswasele, by contrast, are remembered as gifted war leaders who appear to have significantly escalated the military capacity of their respective merafe. As the two rulers expanded their political control ever deeper into the Kalahari sand veld, the region's inhabitants were further reduced to the servile status of *batlhanka*.

During the campaign, Mabeleng's son Seeiso was captured along with his surviving followers and taken back to the Bangwaketse centre in Seoke. There, Seeiso himself was allowed to form his ward, which survives to this day in Kanye. At the same time, most of the rest of Bakgwatheng were distributed as *batlhanka* among various Bangwaketse lineages.

Some Bakgwatheng fled south to join the Barolong, while others moved westward to the Matsheng region, where they merged with other groups, such as the Bangologa.

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[57] Schapera & Van der Merwe, D.F. [1945] 10; Schapera, I. [1942] 2; BNA PP 1/1/10 & 1/3/14; WCW 739-40.

The Bakgwatheng resistance war was thus more than another of the countless dynastic skirmishes that have occurred among the putative descendants of Matsieng over the centuries. It was an event that reinforced the separate and unequal relationship between the Bakgalagari and Batswana merafe of southern Botswana, more generally, by the early 19th century.

In Sekwena accounts, Motswasele's martial qualities are reflected in surviving praise poems, an extract:

"He is the brave and ruthless Refuser, the great traveller among the Bakwena, who wears a white porcupine cap. Refuser! Great Kgori Bustard! Shake yourself so that your back feathers might moult. The man Molebatse called meetings, then you beat your feathers, and there was the flash of lightning. You scared the people. Disturber of the forests of Tlajwane [located in what is now South Africa], you kept on disturbing the forests, and you took the forests and ruined them. The antelope could arrive because it is small. The Refuser is like a swarm of bees."[58]

The "porcupine cap" was a crown worn by Bakwena dikgosi during wartime and when they addressed meetings in the veld, *letsholo* and *dipitso*. The headdress's quills pointed outwards in all directions, symbolising their invulnerability. The beating and shaking of the Kori (Kgori) Bustard's feathers alludes to Motswasele shaking the dust from his shield of war. In this respect, modern Botswana's national bird was already a symbol of strength and agility among the crocodile clans.

References to the first Motswasele, as a great traveller, connects to traditions that he once journeyed as far as the Indian Ocean, where he came back with stories of the white men, that is, the Portuguese in Mozambique. His praise poem thus also contains an early reference to ball shot, bullets.

The Bangwato Breakaway

Prominent among the region's *merafe*, who lived under the kingship of Motshodi the Good, were the Bangwato. Their dynastic roots date back to at least the 16th century with the birth of its progenitor, Ngwato, as a junior son of a Kgosi of the Bakwena bagaMagopa. According to common legend, Kwena, followed by

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[58] *"Mmmamagana yoobogale-gale, yoonoko tshweu, Tsamai aKwena; Mmmamagana, kgori, ikudubatse! Kgori o ka ikudubatse mokgethi yo mmotlana, Rapitso yo bo Molebatse. Ya ba yare phoha tsa gago, Tsa ntei tsa tloga, Tladi lesa gala, O tshose batho. Khuduanya yadikgwa tsaga Tlajwane, gaeanna yahuduanya dikgwa, yatshwara dikgwa, yadigobera tsotlhe. Nne phale e tla hitla, Ka e phalana! Mmmamagana motshitshi."*

Ngwato and Ngwaketse, were the sons of an ancient BagaMagopa ruler named Malope, or his son Masilo.
This fraternal relationship is often cited to affirm the unity of the Bakwena, Bangwaketse, and Bangwato, along with the Batawana (later offshoots of the Bangwato), whose pre-colonial kingdoms collectively incorporated much of the territory of modern Botswana. Other variations of the story also place Mohurutshe, the putative founder of the Bahurutshe, in the same generation as Ngwato, Ngwaketse and Kwena. However, as was observed, more detailed genealogies of the BagaMagopa royal lineage suggest that while Ngwato and Ngwaketse were actual figures, they belonged to different generations.

Ngwato himself is said to have adopted the duiker (*phuti*) rather than the crocodile (*kwena*) as his totem. The story goes that he was being pursued by a war party when he took cover in some bushes. As his pursuers approached his hiding place, a duiker sprang from the bush, leading them off Ngwato's trail.

Versions of the story have Ngwato fleeing from Kwena, but this seems unlikely given that the Bangwato only broke away from the Bakwena many generations later. For several generations, the heirs of Ngwato and Ngwaketse remained sub-rulers under the authority of the senior BagaMagopa lineage.

The known royal descendants of Ngwato are his son Molwa, who was the father of Thamasiga, who begat Serogolo, who begat Madirana. It was during Madirana’s time that the Bangwato joined the Bakwena of Kgosi Kgabo in settling in what is now Botswana. Madirana was succeeded by Kesitilwe, who begat Makgasana, who begat Moleta and Mokgadi.

Few details are known about Ngwato's descendants until the appearance of Moleta's son Mathiba, whose turbulent reign was marked by both the Bangwato breakaway from the Bakwena and the Batawana breakaway from the Bangwato.

Accounts dating back to the early 1800s agree that Mathiba became the first independent Bangwato ruler after being expelled from Kweneng by the Bakwena Kgosi Motswasele I, who had previously served as his mentor.[59]

As a young boy, Mathiba lived with his father, Moleta, on a hill known as Boshwelakgosi, located a few kilometres north of Gaborone. After Moleta's death, Mathiba's uncle Mokgadi became the Bangwato regent. Mathiba's mother feared Mokgadi, suspecting that he might try to kill her son to become Kgosi in

[59] This account of Bangwato succession is primarily based on Willoughby’s notes on the split in WCW 739, BNA PP 1/1/10 testimony of Motswakhumo Kgosidintsi, and Sebele in *Dico.* It is generally consistent with versions in Schapera [1954], Tlou [1985], Brown [1926], and Parsons [1973].

his own right. She, therefore, arranged for him to be brought up in Motswasele I's household.

At this time, Motswasele was married to Mokgadi's daughter. He is said to have also requested to marry her sister, but Mokgadi refused. Motswasele then asked Mathiba why Mokgadi was refusing. Mathiba replied, "Why do you ask me? Am I the Kgosi?"

Motswasele responded, "You are not the Kgosi now, but if I make you Kgosi, what will your attitude be?" Hearing this, Mathiba knew Motswasele wanted him to assume the throne from his uncle.

However, Mokgadi was unwilling to surrender the throne. It is alleged that Mathiba, accompanied by members of his mophato, ultimately went to Mokgadi's house at night and strangled him. After the discovery of Mokgadi's corpse, people began to suspect Mathiba, whose movements had been noticed. Some went to Motswasele to report their suspicions. However, the Mokwena told them that Mathiba, whom he described as a mature young man, had been with him throughout the night in question.

After that, Mathiba assumed his place as Bangwato Kgosi. However, he sat uneasily on his stool as one of Mokgadi's sons, Mongwe, was determined to take revenge.

At first, Mongwe and his followers pretended to accept Mathiba's innocence. He further advised the new Kgosi to assert his authority by doing things without Motswasele's permission, such as ordering his people to plough. Motswasele, however, was initially indifferent to such modest provocations. So Mongwe waited until it was time for Bakwena girls to enter initiation school (*bojale*). He then incited the Bangwato, alleging that the Bakwena were stealing their cattle. In the uproar, some Bangwato are alleged to have violated the initiation camp, even stripping two of Motswasele's wives. In response, Motswasele I attacked and defeated the Bangwato.

Historically, the hill site of the skirmish has been associated with at least three different names: Ngwaritse, Boswelakgosi, and Kope. The name Ngwaritse appears more commonly in Sengwato accounts. Kope refers to a historical figure, rendered Kgopa or Kgope, who is otherwise remembered as a senior Mongwato Kgosana and principal backer of Mathiba. It is said that Kgope took the lead in bringing Mathiba back to the Bangwato after his years of residence among the Bakwena.

The Bangwato's expulsion from eastern Kweneng was followed by years of migration and struggle.

From Ngwaritse, Mathiba initially led the Bangwato northward to the area around Ramaselwana Hill, which now forms the junction of the Kweneng, Kgatleng, and Central Districts. After that, Mathiba migrated to Lophephe, followed by Marutlwa, before settling in Shoshong.

Before the arrival of the Bangwato, two other *merafe*, the Baphaleng and Bakaa, were already settled in the Shoshong Hills. The Baphaleng are believed to have originally been a branch of the Bakwatlheng. A century earlier, the Bakwena under Kgabo drove them out of Dithejwane Hills. Subsequently, the Bangwato drove them from the region around Ngwaritse.

Notwithstanding the above, Sengwato accounts insist that the Baphaleng invited the Bangwato to join them at Shoshong. However, the subsequent pattern of Baphaleng subordination casts doubt about the veracity of this version of events.

According to their traditions, the Bakaa settled at Shoshong during the reign of Kgosi Mmopane aMagogwe. The Bakaa and Bakhurutshe agree that the latter group had also previously lived in the area. In this respect, the Bakaa acknowledge that they paid tribute to the Bakhurutshe for a period before they were either expelled or driven from the area by drought.

The Bangwato memory differs, claiming that the Bakaa had previously come to them at Ngwaritse as refugees during Mokgadi's time. Their version further insists that Mokgadi had initially settled the Bakaa at Shoshong as his vassals. The Bakaa, in turn, reduced the Baphaleng to servitude, which may account for the latter’s alleged overtures to the Bangwato. At any rate, the Bangwato under Mathiba arrived at Shoshong to find the area already occupied by Bakaa, who were ruled by Mmopane's son Motlhabane. After a period of uneasy coexistence, Mathiba attacked Bakaa, who fled back to Motswasele's Bakwena.

Batawana Breakaway

The tragedy of Mathiba’s reign did not end with his controversial enthronement and humiliating expulsion from eastern Kweneng. His later years and death could be readily adapted as source material for a fraternal Setswana variation of Shakespeare's "King Lear".

Before his death, Mathiba was cast off by his sons, Kgama and Tawana, who, in each case, established rival kingships at their father's expense.[60] Tawana was the older of the two and long favoured by his father. Among his several wives, Tawana's mother alone had been at Mathiba's side during his formative residence among the Bakwena. However, Mathiba's efforts to declare her as his Great Wife or Queen had failed, with the Bangwato having instead designated Kgama as his true heir.

The rivalry between Tawana and Kgama is said to have been further aggravated when the former, either by design or accident, injured the latter's eye by pulling back on a branch of a thorn tree. Such incidents convinced Kgama that Tawana was determined to usurp his inheritance. Tensions between the pair, each backed by their *mephato*, continued to grow during the latter years of Mathiba's reign. They ultimately overshadowed his royal authority while drawing in others, such as Tawana's younger sibling Monageng.

The final split between the two factions was initiated when Tawana travelled with supporters to Shokwane to consult with the then-ageing but active Bakwena Kgosi Motswasele I. While surviving traditions vary somewhat regarding the chronology of what happened next, the primary narrative is consistent. Determined to bid for power but aware that his brother's succession to the throne continued to enjoy the strong backing of leading *dikgosana*, Tawana was preparing a fallback plan.

If he could not become the Kgosi of all the Bangwato, he could at least stake out on his own and secure a following. However, this would require a place to settle and the possible goodwill of others.

For his part, Motswasele was unwilling to intervene directly in Tawana's favour against his brother. But, he was prepared to support a secession bid. At the time, the Kwena claimed ownership over the Boteti region, where he established a small settlement in Rakops. However, his hold over the distant Bakwena outpost was tenuous at best. Since the first Motswasele through to the reign of his great-great-grandson Sechele I, successive Bakwena monarchs eyed Boteti as a strategic gateway to the rich hunting grounds of northern Botswana and trading nexus to the wealth of Zimbabwe.

Motswasele, who, as was noted, was praised as "Tsamai aKwena" for his youthful long-distance travels, was particularly interested in the exotic goods of the Portuguese (*Mapotogisi*), which were then traded in the lands of the Banyayi Mambo.

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[60] Tlou [1985] 38-41; Nettleton [1934] 343-44; WCW file 731; BNA PP 1/2/9.

In this context, the old crocodile spied on opportunity in Mathiba's floundering paternal authority. A divided Bangwato would constitute less of a potential threat to his northern and northeastern trade routes. At the same time, a friendly, smaller elephant in the north could expand his practical sphere of influence.

It is thus said that while he was at Shokwane, Tawana was advised by Motswasele to settle in the Kwebe Hills, which indeed became his ultimate destination. Tawana sent out scouts to the region who reported favourably on it. After that, the followers of Tawana finally broke away from the remaining supporters of Kgama at a place near modern Shoshong, which has ever since been known as Motseodule (the village has left). Before the final split, Mathiba attempted to proclaim Tawana as his successor, but most of Bangwato stayed loyal to Kgama.

After a season at Lophepe under the Bakwena's eye, Tawana's followers, including his father, moved northwards, settling at Kedia on the Boteti. Kgama pursued them there, though the accounts differ in his ultimate intent and actions. Some say a significant battle ensued, while others say Kgama merely insisted on the return of several unwilling participants in the migration, including Tawana's younger brother Monageng.

Still others claim that Motswasele intervened to mediate the conflict after an initial skirmish, ending the hostilities. Interpretations of a praise poem of Kgama, found in Schapera's collections, strongly suggest that there had been at least some bloodshed. In its opening passage, the poem describes Kgama as the Hammerer or Beater who transformed his opponents into girls and staffs:

"Hammerer of mine, transformer of people, You transformed Monabjwa and company into girls, You carved Matsunyane and company into staffs, Hammerer who is mighty, Your ribs are tight as those of a buffalo.[61]

According to Schapera, boMonabya refers to the Menyatso ward of Monabya Ntshosa. In contrast, boMatsunyane refers to the unfortunate fate that befell two of Tawana's followers whom Kgama captured at Kedia – Matsunyane aSeetso aMokgadi along with his cousin Modisenyane aMorongwa aMokgadi. Kgama is said to have killed the two by cutting off their arms and legs, thus carving them into sticks.[62]

In the end, Kgama returned to Motseodule with Monageng and perhaps others, leaving Tawana and most of his followers in peace thereafter.

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[61] Schapera [1965]*"Mmamathula wa gaka, mfetola-batho, ofetotse boMonabya basetsana, obetla boMatsunyane dirokana; Mmamathula yo omagagarapa, okopo dibotswalele."*
[62] *"Obetla boMatsunyane dirokana".*

Once free of his brother's threat, Tawana ruled independently, no longer respecting his father's authority. Frustrated and possibly debilitated by malaria, Mathiba set out with a handful of followers for Shokwane. However, upon their arrival, they found that Motswasele was unwilling to accommodate them permanently.

Mathiba then sent a message to ask for forgiveness and refuge from Kgama, saying that he was tired of wandering and needed a place to die. Kgama, too, refused to take him in, instead sending his father seven head of cattle. This final blow so depressed Mathiba that he committed suicide. Motswasele died shortly after that of old age.

Seitlhamo and Legwale

The Bakwena Kgosi Motswasele I ruled for a long time before he was finally succeeded by his son Seitlhamo, whose mother was Moitsatsemane. At the time of his accession, Seitlhamo was already an old man. His short reign was characterised by conflict with various neighbouring groups, while internally, he contributed to a legacy of dynastic division among the descendants of Kgabo.

The most detailed known account of Seitlhamo’s reign comes from Kgabo aTebele, who notes that in contrast to his father Motswasele’s somewhat mercurial character, he possessed a calm and patient temperament. As an obedient and good-natured son often entrusted with carrying out duties on his father's behalf, he was also said to have been a popular prince among his people. When Motswasele was near the end of his life and infirm, Seitlhamo resisted the temptation to seize de facto power for himself but rather continued to follow his father's wishes.

As is often the case with Setswana royalty, Seitlhamo's troubles began with questions over his succession. The Kgosi came to favour an elder son named Tshosa, born before his true heir, Legwale. While it was then customary among Batswana for the dikgosi to have many wives, it was generally clear who among them was the Queen or *Mohumagadi mogolo*, whom the morafe had sanctioned to bear the heir to the throne. Thus, Mma-Legwale (Kudubane), betrothed while still a child was designated as the first wife, followed by Mma-Tshosa, although the latter gave birth to a son first.

Because Seitlhamo had ascended to power with Tshosa by his side and liked him very much, he began to consider altering the line of succession. However, Legwale, with the loyal support of a brother by the same mother named Maleke, was determined to secure his throne.

As they grew into manhood, Mma-Legwale's sons are further said to have shown the Bakwena that they were brave and capable warriors.

For his part, Tshosa is said to have had a ruthless streak and was otherwise eager to take advantage of his father's favouritism to gain power. One day, Seitlhamo called a big *pitso* gathering to ensure Tshosa became the next Kgosi.

At the time, Maleke was away at a cattle post at Ngwawe Hills, but word of the development reached him. Maleke then mobilised his regiment, which was known as Magata. Thus, when the *pitso* gathered around a large morula tree, Maleke arrived with the Magata bearing arms, who he ordered to break up the *pitso*. During the resulting fight, Maleke's men carried the day, resulting in the following praise:

"The shield is broken. I hit the heads of the disturbers of the village, and I smash the heads of stubborn people. I hear them denying Legwale the village and arguing against Ra-Dikeledi."[63]

As Kgabo aTebele observed, Maleke had thrown a stone that had broken up the *pitso*. Still, the stone, metaphorically symbolising kingship, *bogosi jwa Bakwena*, turned into a "hallowed out melon" that others could harvest.

Although Maleke had rallied in his brother Legwale's defence, after the showdown, he mocked him, accusing his elder brother of cowardice. For his part, Legwale replied, "We are a pair; it is true I could not do anything for myself."

However, the matter did not rest. Thus, a second royal jealousy, born out of polygamy, was planted among Bakwena bagaKgabo, the first caused by Motshodi favouring Maoto over Legojane. However, Seitlhamo created a more significant rift, as Legwale and Tshosa passed it on to their children and grandchildren.

In the aftermath of the *pitso*, the Bakwena were settled at Mokgweng, near Dithubaruba, to the west of Molepolole. Legwale was known as the son of the Kgosi, and Tshosa remained his younger brother, although he was older by age.

Perhaps out of a desire to prove himself, Legwale attempted to interfere in the affairs of the Bakgatla bagaKgafela after their former regent, Makgatso, fled to the Bakwena and appealed for support against his nephew and successor, Pheto. Legwale thus led the "bold black ones" into the Bakgatla country, where he was defeated and captured before being released back to his people.

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[63] Leboka in WCW file 739

The elderly Seitlhamo had not personally participated in the raid. What emerges from the Sekwena accounts is that in the aftermath of Legwale's setback, the conflict between Legwale and Tshosa intensified, with arguments over the allocation of cattle and other royal property.

While there are contradictory accounts of the chronology of Seitlhamo's death, there is a clear consensus that he met his fate in the hands of the Bangwaketse, who, by the time, were led by Kgosi Makaba II. The elder Seitlhamo was then staying with four of his children, one of whom was a son named Mooketsi. By some accounts, Mooketse became estranged from Seitlhamo after squandering the livestock he inherited from his mother's house, earning his father's rebuke. Sometime later, when he was tasked with watering cattle on the Notswane, he arranged to meet secretly with Makaba II to inform him that Seitlhamo was vulnerable, being almost alone in the village as the regiments were away herding and protecting the cattle. Makaba's army then left, with Mooketsi accompanying them. The Bangwaketse thus found Seitlhamo at Mokweng virtually unguarded and killed him in the early hours of the morning.

After this incident, Mooketsi went with the Bangwaketse back to Kanye, among whom he now intended to stay. However, soon after their arrival, Makaba had Mooketsi executed, saying that since he had killed his father, he could just as quickly kill him as well.

The killing of Seitlhamo and subsequent strife between the Bakwena and Bangwaketse are seemingly reflective of an escalation of intercommunal violence in the wider region associated with the reign of Makaba II, the infamous "Rod of Moleta".

Legwale is said to have ruled for only a short following his father's death.[64] Eager to assert his martial prowess and the fortunes of his morafe, he soon undertook another cattle-raiding expedition. According to Tebele, he set out for the Banyayi-dominated lands to his north. The raid ended in another tragedy, with Legwale being killed in an apparent ambush in the vicinity of the Shoshong Hills. While the identity of Legwale's killers is a matter of dispute, sources point to his slayers as having been Babirwa rather than Banyayi. In this context, it is also commonly alleged that Tshosa, who had publicly opposed the raid, secretly alerted the Babirwa of Legwale's coming, resulting in his death. As further evidence of treachery, it is claimed that Legwale was the only fatality suffered during the expedition.

[64] Some accounts even suggest that he perished before his father.

Motswasele II

Following Legwale's death, his younger brother Maleke became regent. However, he, too, died shortly thereafter after being bitten in the leg by a rabid dog. By then, the Bakwena had moved from Mokgweng to Dithubaruba, where Maleke died.

Thus, as a result of a combination of jealousy, murder, and tragic circumstances, Kgosi Seitlhamo and the sons of his first house perished one after another, leaving the children of Legwale and his senior wife Monye to perpetuate his line. In this respect, Legwale is known to have had at least five sons, including Motswasele II, Segokotlo, and Seipone from his senior house, Molese from his second house, as well as three daughters - Mpilo, Mpelonyane, and Mmakgama.[65]

As the eldest of Seitlhamo's grandsons, Motswasele II was proclaimed his heir. However, his uncle Tshosa, who had coveted the throne for himself, initially served as his guardian and regent. Having been warned that the Bangwaketse intended to help themselves to Bakwena cattleposts at Mantsho, Tshosa successfully ambushed the raiders. He is also credited with repulsing a second Bangwaketse raiding party at Kgomphata.

After initiating Motswasele II alongside his son Moruakgomo, Tshosa had the Bakwena move from Dithubaruba to build at Shokwane. There, Motswasele was given the throne and began to rule. Motswasele, in turn, made Tshosa a sub-chief.

Shortly thereafter, the Bakwena set out to raid the Bangwaketse cattle posts in and around Lobatse. A Bangwaketse ward called Bagasebako had settled at Mathuba, at the top of the hills just south of Lobatse, while another, the Makabe ward, was also nearby.[66]

The Bagasebako saw them coming and mobilised to meet them on the hilly plains of Gapeana (Gapiana). The Bangwaketse fought well and successfully chased the Bakwena away, killing them in great numbers. Among those who were killed were many Bakwena sub-chiefs.

A group led by Tshosa son Moruakgomo escaped to the principal Bakwena settlement at Mokgweng, southwest of Molepolole. Moruakgomo also had a younger brother named Kgake, who was born at this time. He was so named by his father, Tshosa, who was surprised at the numbers that had fallen in the raid.

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[65] Mmakgama was still alive in the early 20th century when she served as one of Willoughby's venerable informants.

[66] The ruins of their place are near the contemporary railway depot, and the remains of their wells at Mathuba survive.

For his part, Moruakgomo was bitter that his father had handed over power to his cousin, believing that he had been thus denied the chance to rule in his own right. In this context, Motswasele II's defeat at Gapeana may have emboldened Moruakgomo to plot against him.

For his part, Motswasele allied with the Bakgatla bagaKgafela to successfully engage in a new raid on the Bangwaketse cattleposts at Segeng.[67] He also avenged his father's death in raids against the Babriwa. His standing was further increased when he gave refuge to the Ragasiko and Barokologadi communities, marrying the daughter of the latter group's Kgosi, who became the mother of his son Kgosidintsi. Depite these small victories the shadow of Makaba II's Bangwaketse still loomed large, resulting in most of the royal Bakwena cattle were herded by regiments at Letlhakeng for their safety.

Whereas Motswasele I is remembered for his tales of the *makgoa*, white people he had visited on the East Coast, Motswasele's reign was marked by the arrival of Europeans in Kweneng. Prominent among the *makgoa* who came to Kweneng were members of the ill-fated 1808 expedition led by British Lieutenant Edward Donovan and army assistant surgeon Alexander Cowan, who, with twenty "Hottentots" of the Cape Regiment, travelled through eastern Botswana with the ultimate intention of reaching the Portuguese in Mozambique. During their stay at Shokwane, the army explorers presented Motswasele II with some European goods, including a mirror that Kgosi is said to have been proud to display. This cache may be the context for his praise name, "Modimowagae." Members of the expedition subsequently perished while travelling along the Limpopo.

Moruakgomo's continued desire to replace Motswasele II on the throne was now kept alive by the Kgosi's increasingly capricious rule, which was reflected in such arbitrary acts as taking his subjects' milk sacks, meat, fields, and, worst of all, wives.[68]

Motswasele may have been encouraged in his transgressions by those who wished to see his downfall. A commonly cited example is the circumstances surrounding the defection of the Maoto ward under Motshebe to the Bangwaketse. It is said that Motswasele II favoured Motshebe, who thus became a target of jealousy.

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[67] The Bakgatla bagaKgafela have since maintained that in return for their support, the Bakwena promised them land along the Madikwe River, which would become the basis of their 19th-century claim to today's Kgatleng District.

[68] Since 1945, perceptions about Motswasele II have been influenced by L.D. Raditladi's famous Setswana play about the ruler's tragic downfall. While Raditladi's depiction of Motswasele's transgressions is consistent with earlier Sekwena traditions, his portrayal of Moruakgomo as the reluctant hero is arguably apocryphal. Critics have interpreted the playwright's portrayal of the conflict between Motswasele II and Moruakgomo as a proxy projection of his prolonged confrontation with Kgosi Tshekedi Khama.

However, on one occasion, Motshebe failed to answer a summons to attend a letsholo meeting. With some speaking out against this apparent sign of disobedience, Motswasele II rashly sent men to punish Motshebe for his absence. Having not received the summon, Motshebe was found with his people, who were staying peacefully in his ward. Undeterred, the punishers ended up stabbing one of Motshebe's followers to death.

Motswasele II reportedly regretted his action after he learned that Motshebe had not been told of the *letsholo*. However, the aggrieved Motshebe removed his people and livestock to Gangwaketse.

With time, Moruakgomo gathered others around him who resented Motswasele's rule. However, before they dared rise against their Kgosi, they knew they had to win over the support of Sejo Monametse, the still loyal headman of the Maunatlala ward. Moruakgomo, therefore, began to spread the rumour that Motswasele intended to kill Sejo. In his plots, Moruakgomo further attracted the support of Motswasele's brother, Segokotlo.

Before his death, Motswasele was warned of the growing conspiracy against him by a certain Mojela. The Kgosi is said to have replied: "If they kill me, they will not live together afterwards but will fight among themselves."[69] Thus, it was that Motswasele aLegwale summoned his last letsholo to confront the conspirators directly, insisting that if it was his destiny, he was prepared to die.

According to a popular tradition, before the axe severed his neck, Motswasele further predicted that his fall would have significant consequences for the Bakwena and others throughout the region. He had warned: "If I am killed, the ants of my father shall come to avenge me."

Over time, tales of his prophecy grew. He is said to have elaborated further that the descendants of his great ancestor Malope would be overwhelmed by the coming of a "time of black ants" (*ditshoswane tse dintshonyana*) who would bring tumult and terror in their wake. He also spoke of the black ants being followed by "white ants" (*ditshoswane tse ditshweunyana*).

In the following decades, Motswasele's final testament has been generally interpreted as a foretelling of the coming into Botswana first of Makololo and Amandebele invaders, followed by the Boer trekkers and British imperialists.

[69] According to his son Kgosidintsi [1902], WCW 739 he used a somewhat vulgar proverbial expression: "*dirotela puriretse tsa rotela tsabone, tsetharo tsatlhoga tsaretelana*."

The decades of dislocations brought about by the successive arrival of Motswasele's ants altered the internal nature and external relationships of communities in the entire area we today know as Botswana.

Stories of the great crocodile's alleged prophecy dovetail with Sekwena accounts echoed by Livingstone and Willoughby, which suggest that before his death, Motswasele II had been in contact with the Bafokeng ruler Sebetwane, whose followers became Makololo. At the very least, there is greater certainty that Sebetwane claimed the right to act as Motswasele's avenger when he attacked the Bakwena.

Motswasele's prophecy can be further understood with reference to the Setswana proverb: "The ants contest the cause of the orphan."[70] The adage may be interpreted as affirming the need for society to secure the well-being of its most vulnerable, thus a call for collective dignity.

The proverb can be more literally interpreted as foreshadowing the subsequent struggles of Motswasele's heir, Sechele, whose very life as well as royal inheritance was, in the wake of his father's execution, left in peril.

[70] *"Molato wa khutsana o lwewa ke ditshowane"*

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF DIKGOSI OF THE BAKWENA IN BOTSWANA

Part 1 Known Royal Ancestors of Kgabo II

1. KGOSI KWENA I
2. KGOSI MONAGENG
3. KGOSI KWENA II
4. KGOSI MASILO
5. KGOSI MOGALE
6. KGOSI MFHETA
7. KGOSI KOLOBE
8. KGOSI RAADIRA
9. KGOSI MAGOPE
10. KGOSI MMAMAGANA
11. KGOSI MOTONE
12. KGOSI PHOKOTSEA
13. KGOSI MASILWE
14. KGOSI KWENA III
15. KGOSI PHOKETSEA II
16. KGOSI MALOPE II
17. KGOSI KGABO I
18. KGOSI TEBELE

Part 2 Royal Line from Kgosi Kgabo II

19. KGOSI KGABO II (founded Kweneng in Botswana)
    - BoNtoedibe claim descent from Masilo, who they maintain was a senior son of Kgabo II who forfeited the throne to “Masiloyane." Masilo does appear in Stow's [1905] genealogies but not in early Sekwena accounts, which suggests that Masilo belongs to an earlier, pre-Kgabo II lineage. The Ntoedibe claim was revived in the 1970s and appears in Okihiro [1976].
20. KGOSI MOTSHODI aKGABO
    - Legojane aMotshudi (died before Motshudi)
21. KGSI MOTSWASELE I aLEGOJANE aMOTSHODI
20. KGOSI SEITLAMO aMOTSWASELE I
20. KGOSI LEGWALE aSEITLHAMO (c.1795-1803)
    - Legwale aSeitlhamo (died before Seitlhamo)
21. KGOSI MALEKE aSEITLHAMO (Regent c.1803-05)
22. KGOSI TSHOSA aSEITLHAMO (Regent c. 1805-7)
23. KGOSI MOTSWASELE II aLEGWALE (c.1807-1822)

24.KGOSI SEGOKOTLO aLEGWALE (Regent 1822-29); following the execution of Motswasele II.

- During this period, there were also rival factions of Bakwena then led by MORUAKGOMO aTSHOSA (1822-28) (killed by Sebetwane) and BUBI aMORUAKGOMO (1828-45), also KGAMA aMONAMETSE aMOTSWASELE I (c.1829-35) (killed by Mzilikazi)

25. KGOSI MOLESE aLEGWALE (Regent 1829-33)
26. KGOSI SECHELE I aMOTSWASELE II aLEGWALE (1833-92)
27. KGOSI SEBELE I aSECHELE I (1892-1911)
28. KGOSI KEALEBOGA SECHELE II aSEBELE I (1911-18)
29. KGOSI SEBELE II aSECHELE II (1918-31) (Detained without charges in Ghanzi 1931-39)
30. KGOSI KGARI aSECHELE II (1931-62)
    - While Kgosi Kgari was serving in the African Pioneer Corps (1942-45), his brother LETLAMMA aSECHELE II acted on his behalf, aided by JACOBA AKGARI aSECHELE I & MARTINUS aSEBONI aMMUPI aSEKGATLHANYE aMOSIEMANEGAPE aLEGOJANE
31. KGOSI KENALEKGOSI aKEBOHULA aSEBELE I (Acting 1962-63)
32. KGOSI NEALE BARUTI SECHELE (1963-70)
33. KGOSI BONEWAMANG a PADI aSECHELE II (African Authority 1970-78)
34. KGOSI MACINTYRE aSECHELE II (African Authority 1978-86)
35. KGOSI MOITALI aMACINTYRE aSECHELE II (African Authority 1986-96)
36. KGOSI KGOSIKWENA aKENELAKGOSI aKEBOHULA aSEBELE I (African Authority 1996-2002)
37. KGOSI KGARI III aBONEWAMANG aPADI aSECHELE II (2002-)

APPENDIX 2: EARLY BAKWENA REGIMENTS

Makgwa (splitters)
Mathametsu (to make it too hard for someone)
Malalamitlwa - Motswasele I aLegojane aMotshudi (camped among thorns)
Magodira (reference to godira plant)
Magodimo – Seitlhamo aMotswasele I (from above)
Makgwa (II) – Tshosa aSeitlamo
Matlhomathebe – Legwale aSeitlhamo (fix shields)
Magata – Senese aSeitlhamo (tramplers)
Mafiri (c.1805) – Mostswasele II aLegwale (hyenas)
Malalamitlwa (c.1810) – Segokotlo aLegwale
Matshelaphala (c.1815) – Sealo aLegwale (leap with luck)
Mateane (c.1820) – Molese aLegwale (meeting)
Mapenapena (1823) Kwena aMatong aSeitlhamo (vanguard)
Malomakgomo (1826) Sechele aMotswasele II

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Archive Holdings

Willoughby Papers, Shelly Oak College (WCW)

This study has drawn extensively from early indigenous accounts of the Bakwena and their neighbours, which the Rev. W.C. Willoughby collected. There are a total of 825 numbered files in the Collection. Source material for this article has, to a greater extent, been sourced from files in the 700 series, which collectively focus on Bantu History, Customs, and Beliefs. These notably include the following titles: Bantu Tribal Assemblies (700), Sechuana students' essays on old gods (709), The Bakgalagadi (718), Batuauna (731), Barolong (732), The Bakgatla (733), The Bahurutse (738), Bakwena (739), Bangwaketsi (740), Modimo, medimo, badimo (770), and Bantu Songs: "Dipina, diboko" (776).

Botswana National Archives (BNA)

This author is indebted to Isaac Schapera for sharing his extensive Collection of Bangwaketse, Bakwena, and Bakgatla bagaMmanaaana oral traditions and genealogies in 1984. Copies of these and subsequent contributions are deposited with BNA as part of the Schapera Private Papers collection. Of particular relevance are files: BNA PP 1/1/10 & 1/3/12 Bakwena; PP 1/2/1-3, & 1/4/14 Bakgatla bagaMmanaana; PP1/2/6 & 1/4/9 Bakaa; PP 1/2/18 Batlokwa; PP 2/1/3 Various histories; PP 1/2/8 & 1/5/12-13 Bahurutshe; PP 1/2/9-10 Ditso tsa Batawana; PP 1/3/14 Bangwaketse.

Also:

BNA S 3/1 "History of the Tswana Tribes".

BNA S421/5: Documents relating to Benjamin Van Niekerk's research, including "Brief report on investigations carried out under the Bakwena re the Administrative Structure of the Bakwena Tribe June- July 1940" and "Additional Report on Enquiries carried out under the Bakwena, Re Administrative structure of the tribe, October 1943."

BNA D.C. Molepolole 4/14 "History of the Bakwena" containing 1926 testimony of Kgabo Tebele and Motswakhumo Kgosidintsi, collected by A. Stigand.

University of Pretoria Van Warmelo Collection

File K 32/23 T.S. More "History of Bakwena ba Mogopa of Venterdorp" (1938), File K 32/25 G.F. Sepeng "History of the Bakwena ba Magopa and Baphalane (1939).

The Collection is available online @ UPSpace @ https://repository.up.ac.za/

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